

## Notes On A Passion

Carole Forman, a wonderfully gifted actress, responded to my offer of appearing as a guest in Dzieci's presentation of A Passion this season, saying:

When I saw A Passion, I was very moved. It was extremely intimate, more an experience than a performance, but I felt an inner conflict knowing how many Jews were maimed, tortured, robbed, and killed using 'The Passion' as an excuse for this treatment – and I also felt the love and respect for all people that is a hallmark of Dzieci. The sense of community and sharing was palpable. I saw how every soul is God and yet every person can be very bad.

I completely understood and respected Carole's response. When Dzieci first chose to attempt an adaptation of The Passion, we went into it with no surety that we'd be able to continue. The questions were simple – What is this work? Who am I in relation to it? And what is necessary?

Even though I'm not practicing, I'm still Jewish, and I've spent time over the past two decades (often with Dzieci) at the Benedictine Abbey of Regina Laudis. This has been wonderfully fulfilling, but being there during Holy Week one year was deeply repellent for me. As certain passages were read aloud not only from the New Testament, but from proclamations by ancient church leaders, I felt personally accused.

I spoke about this with some of the nuns but had no idea whether or not they changed, or even could change, the protocol. Then one year, they asked me to direct them in their own presentation of The Passion for Holy Week. And they wanted to follow the structure of Dzieci's Makbet (which they'd seen and loved!), in which everyone is every character. So, we took that on. And while exploring the piece with about eight nuns, I felt a need to soften it, make it more vulnerable, more immediate.

They had one sister reading and the rest took turns with the other parts. I asked if they'd ever heard of Janusz Korczak, the educator in Poland who had joined his pupils when they were taken away to the camps. Interestingly enough, they had, and they revered him. And that became the underlining architecture for the piece. The reader was Korczak, the other nuns his pupils, and all were to be both culpable and divine. To this, I added that the Nazis were coming and, while we rehearsed, I had Dziecis begin stomping their feet, getting louder as the play progressed.

After this experience, astonishing to behold, I felt there was more to explore in The Passion. The Dziecis agreed with me, and we spent a year researching various translations, and trying to clarify and humanize the text. Since then, Dzieci has returned to this piece annually, continuing to seek an essence, which is beyond (and beneath) the specific doctrine.

Carole saw A Passion the first year it was presented. The piece has come a long way since then, and perhaps still has a long way to go, but I've been amazed how, not only Christians, but also Jews, have been grateful for the work. The main thing, though, is that it works for me. Jesus (Jeshua, in our version) was a Jew, and if in some small way, I can help return him to this perspective, then I am at peace with the process.

As we enter this, our tenth season of A Passion, we ask again — What is this work? Who am I in relation to it? And what is necessary? We are not looking for answers, only to see if a question still exists.

Matt Mitler 2/21/27